

Kennedy, Nixon: 2 Faces of One Era

By CLIFTON DANIEL
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21—Now in the bleak November of President Nixon's unhappiest year the nation is being reminded of another November and another President—John F. Kennedy, dead these 10 years. Comparisons between the two men are inevitable, but to some in Washington—and not Mr. Nixon's friends alone—comparisons somehow seem unfair: Jack

News
Analysis
Kennedy made the Presidency look so easy. For President Nixon these days, it looks so hard. Once they were contemporaries and competitors. They served together in the House of Representatives. Each went on to the Senate. They ran for President against each other. Each in his turn was elected narrowly.

While they were political opponents, Mr. Nixon felt they were personal friends. The Nixons were invited to the Kennedys' wedding.

Their careers were intertwined; they interacted with each other. In a sense, Richard M. Nixon was the political descendant of John F. Kennedy. The Nixon White House was an extension, an enlargement, of the Kennedy Presidency.

Even the issues they faced, 10 years apart, often bore the same labels.

President Kennedy in 1963 was slipping into the Vietnam morass from which it took President Nixon four years to extricate the nation.

With the nuclear test ban treaty, President Kennedy took the first step toward the détente with the Soviet Union that became one of Mr. Nixon's prime diplomatic objectives.

The détente was put to the test of an East-West confrontation in both administrations—in Cuba and at the Berlin Wall during President Kennedy's time, in the Middle East during President Nixon's.

Both Presidents had their troubles with Congress. At the time of Mr. Kennedy's death, only 38 per cent of his legislative proposals had been acted upon by either house of Congress.

In purely statistical terms, President Nixon's record of accomplishment, at home and abroad, could easily stand comparison, as his friends claim, with President Kennedy's rec-

ord.

Yet, President Kennedy is enshrined in the nation's memory, while President Nixon is obliged to fight for his place in history and for the very job he holds.

Why?

The short answer is Watergate. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. points out in *The Atlantic Monthly* for November, the Nixon Administration faces a long list of potential criminal charges for acts that the President either must have known about or should have found out about.

Yet, thoughtful men in Washington see more to it than Watergate. To quote Professor Schlesinger again, "Nixon's Presidency is not an aberration but a culmination. It carries to reckless extremes a compulsion toward Presidential power rising out of deep-running changes in the foundations of society."

President Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia was only a step beyond President Johnson's use of the Tonkin Gulf incident to justify an attack on North Vietnam, and that was only a step beyond President Kennedy's authorization for the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

President Kennedy got away with it. Presidents Johnson and Nixon did not.

After the Bay of Pigs, which was a disaster, President Kennedy reached his highest level of popular support in the Gallup Poll—83 per cent in 1961.

President Johnson was hounded out of office by opposition to his war policy.

President Nixon's popularity has now dropped to 27 per cent, and in the latest Gallup Poll people have voted 5 to 1 in favor of curbing the President's war-making powers.

Ten years ago that issue did not arise. At the time of President Kennedy's death in Dallas, there were only 11,000 American troops in Vietnam, and there had been only 32 killed in battle and 80 wounded in the previous two years.

At the peak, under President Johnson, there were 543,400 Americans in Vietnam, and 45,933 were killed and 393,616 wounded before the peace settlement last January.

It was President Johnson who reaped the whirlwind—violent demonstrations against the war, black riots in the

cities, the revolt on the campuses, and a revolution in manners, morals and social values.

President Nixon had every reason to believe the storm had blown over when he stood up at the Capitol last Jan. 20 to deliver his second Inaugural address. He had received the largest popular vote of any President in history. After the Vietnam peace settlement, his popularity in the Gallup Poll reached 68 per cent.

This time 10 years ago, President Kennedy's rating, which had slumped after a civil rights speech in June, was 59 per cent.

But the people who remember John F. Kennedy in Washington this week are not remembering statistics. They are remembering his style—his youth, his zest, his good looks, his smile, his wit, his easy manner.

Some can also remember when he did not appear to have those priceless intangibles of political success.

Bryce Harlow, counselor to President Nixon, recalls meeting Mr. Kennedy in 1947 and Mr. Nixon in 1948, when they were both freshmen Congressmen. Mr. Kennedy was morose, withdrawn, almost antisocial, Mr. Harlow said this week. But in 1960, when he had decided to run for President, Mr. Harlow observed an astonishing transformation in Senator Kennedy: "He had become absolutely luminous."

"He and Jackie," Mr. Harlow said, "were about the two most attractive people we have ever had run for office in this country."

As for Mr. Nixon, Mr. Harlow said: "I think Richard M. Nixon's intellect is the best I have seen in the White House, ranging back to Franklin D. Roosevelt."

Comparing the two men, he said: "This is a contrast in personality—the lithe, bright and gay Irish spirit of Kennedy versus the extremely hard-working, work-oriented, somewhat reclusive individual and hard political in-fighter, Nixon."

Because of the way Jack Kennedy was, his was a happy Presidency, even though it had an unhappy ending. Mr. Nixon's Presidency has plainly become an unhappy one. Washington does not profess to know what the ending will be.